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Committee of Council on Education.*



CHOICE
TREASURES OF ART
OF THE
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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ASSISTANT KEEPER IN THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.



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I



CHASE OR RELIQUARY. LIMOGES ENAMEL.
XIII CENTURY. SOLTIKOFF COLLECTION

RELIQUARY.

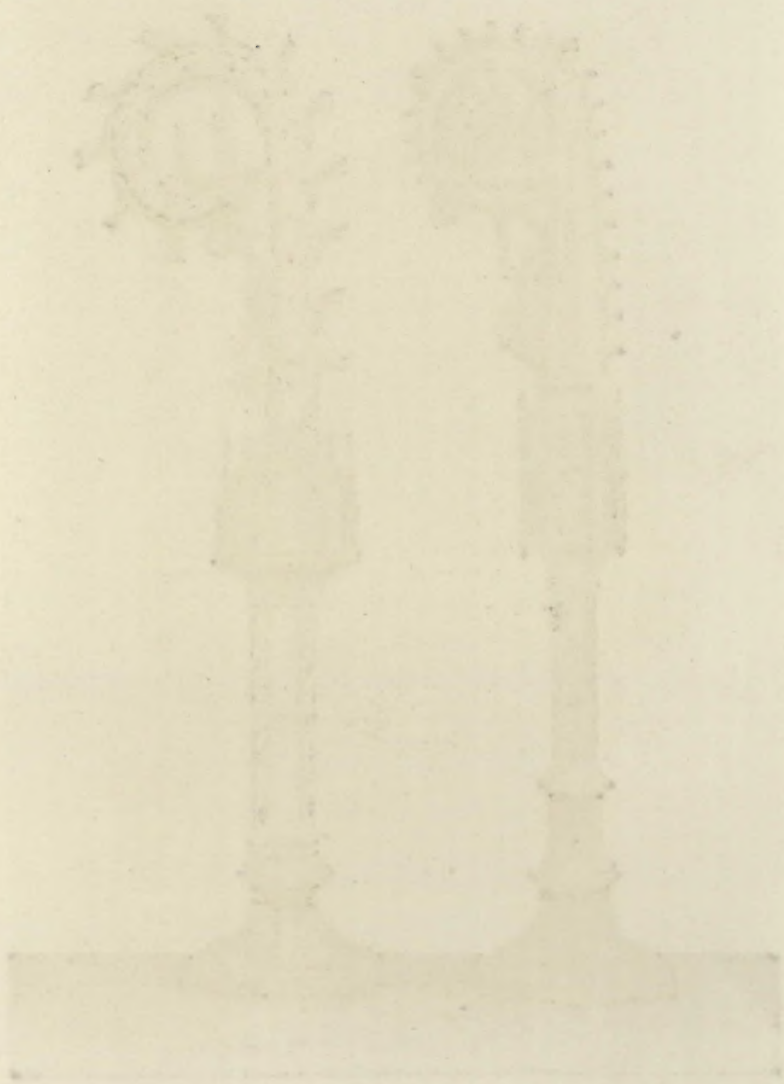


HE "chasse" or reliquary is an ecclesiastical utensil, of which numerous specimens have come down to the present age. Nor is this at all wonderful, as the sacred use to which it was destined must have tended greatly to preserve it from many of the risks to which purely secular objects were exposed. In great variety of material and of size, according to the dignity of the contents or the riches of the owner, the *chasse* is found in stone, crystal, ivory, or metal, in the cathedral or the private oratory. One fact, however, is noteworthy, namely, that the form of the *chasse* scarcely, if ever, varies, and this fact points to some common type to which it was thought fitting that all should conform. The sepulchral chests of the Etruscans, so numerous in Italian museums, were of this precise shape; but it is, more probably, to the traditional idea of the Ark of the Covenant that the form of the *chasse* is to be traced. In the "Loggie" of Raphael, and in many earlier works, the Ark will be found figured exactly like a gothic *chasse*. The celebrated Chasse de

Reliquary.

St. Genevieve figures frequently in French history, its latest, or one of the latest, important occasions being when it was exhibited to excite the devotion of the people during the fatal sickness of Louis XV.

The specimen here figured is of brass, and was made in the thirteenth century, at Limoges, the head-quarters of the interesting art of enamelling. This class of ornament—saints standing in niches—probably originated in Byzantium, and spread from that early centre of Christian art to the various countries of Europe, where, in tempera, mosaic, or stained glass, numerous similar subjects may be found.





PASTORAL STAVES. IVORY AND ENAMEL.

XIV CENTURY. SOLTIKOFF COLLECTION.

BISHOPS' STAVES.

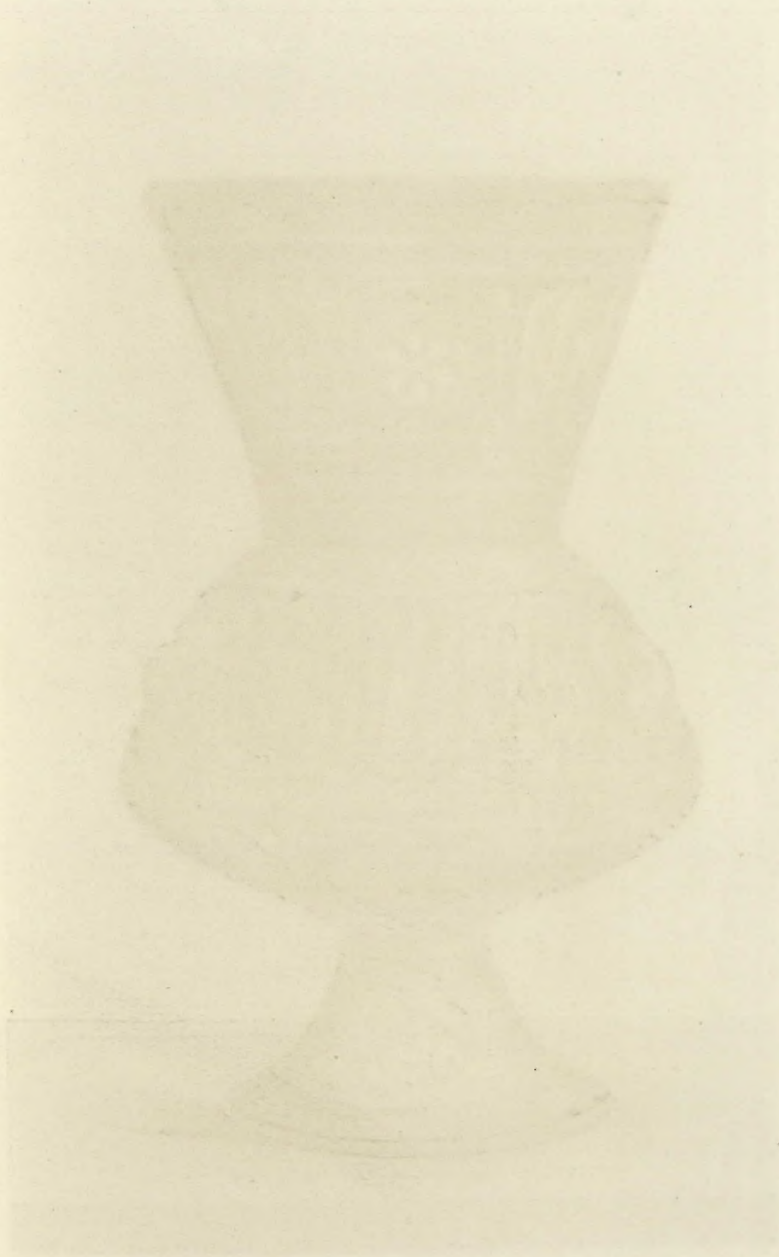


NOT long ago a writer would have been deemed quite correct who should have described the two interesting objects here figured as heads of croziers. Indeed, so common was this epithet, that its employment is by no means extinct, and one can scarcely be blamed for still adopting it. Nevertheless, as nowadays in ritualistic matters we are "nothing if not critical," it may be as well to specify that the crozier, properly so termed, is the processional cross borne by the archdeacon, and that the present objects are the heads or volutes of the pastoral staff or crook which symbolized the episcopal dignity. Both of these crooks have their stems decorated with enamel, and the knop in each case is formed by figures of saints beneath Gothic canopies. In one instance, however, the volute is filled by a delicately carved French ivory of the fourteenth century; in the other, by a gilt metal figure of a bishop (probably the donor) kneeling before the Virgin. An inscription on this latter staff gives us the

Bishops' Staves.

date 1351: the workmanship is probably French. The style of this beautiful work greatly resembles that of the pastoral staff belonging to William of Wykeham, now preserved in the chapel of New College, Oxford.

The question has been often mooted to what country the workmanship of this celebrated staff was justly ascribable. Though the design so much resembles in detail portions of the great bishop's works still extant, as to render it probable that he may himself have furnished the idea, we must honestly admit that the translucent enamels have a very French appearance, and look like those on works of unquestioned foreign origin.






GLASS LAMP FROM AN ARAB MOSQUE.

XIV CENTURY.

ARABIC GLASS LAMP.

HE great epoch of Arabian power, notwithstanding the important influence which it exercised upon Western thought and literature,—a fact which shows itself clearly in our scientific nomenclature, e. gr., algebra, alkali, almanac,—is nevertheless somewhat dim and unhistoric. “The golden time of good Haroun Alraschid” seems by common consent relegated to the domain of fancy, and we resent rather than commend the industry of those Orientalists who depoetize Alnaschar by translating him into El-Nesheer, the carpenter. We have here, however, visible evidence that the heroes of the Thousand and One Nights were actual mortals like ourselves, in the bodily form of a glass lamp from one of their mosques.

These lamps are not very common in European collections, probably owing to their sacred destination, which has rendered them difficult to be obtained. They are mostly of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and their date is generally easy to be identified by the Arabic inscriptions containing the name of some Sultan,

Arabic Glass Lamp.

which form so important a part of the decoration. The place of their manufacture is somewhat uncertain. It can scarcely have been in Egypt itself, as the numerous errors in the inscriptions rather point to the employment of foreign workmen ; although this argument loses some force in respect of the frequent mis-spellings of German and Italian metal-workers, as evidenced on works of more costly character than these lamps. The mention in many mediæval inventories of Damascus glass renders it probable that manufactories existed in Asia Minor, from which the Sultans of Egypt may have obtained their supply.

It is somewhat remarkable that in the earliest bronze carvings of Italy, lamps of this identical and peculiar form may be found represented, and, so far as the present writer is aware, always employed as typical of a sacred building. In the ancient bronze door of the Cathedral of Pisa, opposite to the Leaning Tower, one of these lamps, suspended beneath a portico, serves to indicate the Temple, on a pinnacle of which the tempter has placed our Saviour.





PLATEAU. ITALIAN MAJOLICA.

XVI CENTURY.

MAIOLICA PLATE.



SOME difficulty has been experienced in making clear to the ordinary observer the merits of the early Italian pottery; nor can it be denied that on a first and casual inspection the real excellencies of this branch of art will be less obvious than is the case in many other divisions. The uneducated eye naturally dwells more upon the coarse ware, the startling contrasts of colour, the conventional tints given to rocks, sky, water, &c., than to the graceful fancy, the free and artistic handling, and in some cases the yet unrivalled colour and lustre which ennoble these early specimens of ceramic art.

The plate here represented dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century, and is interesting as showing the favourite style of ornament then prevailing in Italy, as also the respect shown to the works of contemporary artists. The border is decorated in the fantastic style well known as *arabesque*, which was employed with such skill by Raphael in the Loggie of the Vatican, and the idea of which, it may be said in passing, he is supposed

Maiolica Plate.

by some to have adopted from the subterranean halls in the Baths of Titus, then recently excavated on the Esquiline Hill. In the centre of the plate is a figure which, though slightly modified, can at once be recognised as the St. George of Donatello. This noble figure, as is well known to the Italian traveller, stands in a niche outside the tower of Orsanmichele (Horrea S. Michaelis), and well deserves the eulogy bestowed on it by Michael Angelo. It is pleasing to find that the merit of the statue was recognised by the potters of Urbino, as well as by the mighty master of all arts; and it is no less instructive to observe how rapidly the genius of Italian artists enriched and developed the rude idea of ornament which Moorish workmen had left in the island of Maiorca, and which, by a slight and thoroughly national alteration, was changed to the well-known term, Maiolica.





IVORY TANKARD. AUGSBURG.

XVII CENTURY.

IVORY TANKARD.



WHILE few or none can be supposed ignorant of the marvellous height of worldly prosperity and of artistic glory to which the Italian republics attained in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, comparatively few have noted the fact that a similar development, both in riches and in taste, was taking place in the free cities of Germany. The present object, though of a somewhat later date than the grand period of Art's second birth, bears full evidence of proceeding from a wealthy and an art-loving community. Indeed, in the art of ivory-carving Germany has ever held a proud traditional rank, dating from the very earliest times of Byzantine teaching, and by no means extinct even at the present day. This tankard is the work of Johann Strauss, a well-known goldsmith of Augsburg, in the earlier years of the seventeenth century. The allegoric group which ornaments the drum or body of the vessel, is one of the usual combinations of Peace, Wisdom, Plenty, *et id genus omne*. The Hercules and Nessus on the lid is obviously a

Ivory Tankard.

modification of the well-known Centaur by John of Bologna, formerly in the Borgo Vecchio of Florence, but of late years transferred to a worthier site beneath the Loggie of Orcagna. The German artist may have been influenced by patriotic feeling in choosing to copy the work of a Teutonic sculptor.

In the tankard, German imagination has often run riot as regards variety, one may even say, fantasticality of form. Birds, bears, lions, nay, even towered cities, have been employed by them to exalt the dignity of drink, little, one would think, to the comfort of the drinker. The present object, though not very agreeable for a cool draught, is among the least eccentric of their models.





FRENCH CLOCK. BUHL-WORK.

LOUIS QUATORZE.

LOUIS QUATORZE CLOCK.



HIS clock is a favourable, though not an extraordinary specimen of the Louis Quatorze style of furniture, a style which, notwithstanding attempts to consign it to neglect, under the contemptuous epithet of *rococo*, was in real dignity far superior to the starved mimicry of classic taste which, having no root in national tastes or requirements, was considered needful and appropriate to inaugurate the new reign of French Liberty. The method of decoration applied to the present object will require no long description, as in small objects it is common and popular, though its costly character will always limit its extensive employment, and confine the larger specimens chiefly to those halls and palaces for which it was first designed. Buhl work, as the incrustation of tortoise-shell and brass is termed, as often happens in similar cases, received its name from the inventor. Nevertheless, as though to bear out the truth of the adage that "the world knows nothing of its greatest men," the orthography of the great cabinet maker's name is somewhat

Louis Quatorze Clock.

doubtful. We have adopted the spelling most in vogue, but which very probably owed its first adoption to its comparative strangeness of appearance, on the principle so well understood by the makers of playbills, "*omne ignotum pro magifico*." At all events, the spelling "Boule" is that preferred, in his Art Dictionary, by Nagler, who, like most Germans, is a painstaking and exhaustive compiler. So determined, indeed, is this author to leave out nobody that he has even inserted in his work the name of "Somebody," who, he tells us, on the authority of Fuseli, was the artist who engraved West's "Death of Wolfe."





TAZZA. ALGERIAN ONYX AND ENAMEL.

MARKED TRADE

ONYX TAZZA.



WE have before made allusion to the fact that Limoges had been at an early date celebrated for its enamels; and although the earliest written record of enamels distinctly fixes their locality in Britain, and noble specimens of enamelling are known to have been produced in Germany at a remote period, to France is due the great majority of works in this singularly beautiful branch of art. And it is worthy of remark that although in the sixteenth century enamelling diminished in excellence and extent so that it might almost have been considered a lost art, yet in its recent revival France is found still maintaining her old-established pre-eminence. The object here given is indeed but a small type of what can be done by the enameller; yet the graceful forms of the Nereids, and the rich tints of drapery and sea-shells, recall the beautiful specimens of the sixteenth century, which, (though in dealers' parlance they are commonly handed over indiscriminately to Benvenuto Cellini,) are doubtless the work of divers forgotten but noteworthy artists. The

Onyx Tazza.

bowl of the cup is formed of the lately discovered Algerian onyx, a singularly beautiful mineral, resembling in appearance the Oriental alabaster, so lavishly employed in the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, at Cairo, and known to Italian tourists by the magnificent columns which support the *baldacchino* of St. Paul's Basilica, at Rome. The onyx, however, is smaller than the alabaster in the size of its masses, and far superior in durability. Visitors to the Exhibitions both of 1862 and of 1867, have no doubt observed instances of its use, especially for the drapery to bronze statues, a purpose to which it is admirably adapted.

The present tazza formed part of the French contribution to the International Exhibition of 1851.





SEVRES PORCELAIN VASE.

CALLED "LA GLOIRE" MODERN.

SEVRES VASE.



THIS is one of the most graceful contributions made by France to the first International Exhibition; nor would it be easy to overpraise the general harmony which reigns among form, colour, and style of decoration. The outline, as will be seen, is purely antique, and might be supposed an exact copy from one of the multitudinous vases that the rich soil of Italy still yields to the excavator in such profusion as almost to warrant a theory which was actually once seriously put forth, that the vases of Etruria and Magna Græcia were due to the fictile power of Nature. The delicate tints of the painting are well known to all admirers of Hamon's classic works, and, combined with artistic perfection of drawing, are surely far more suitable ornaments for a modern drawing-room than a merely servile reproduction of the imperfection incident to the primitive decorators of the old pottery.

The subject of this drawing is not one which he who runs may read; nor need its obscurity be a re-

Sevres Vase.

proach. An allegory on the banks of the Nile (to borrow the language of dear Mrs. Malaprop,) is privileged to be somewhat mysterious, and a similar claim may be fairly allowed to one from the banks of the Seine. Whether the group of children who, in accord with a well-known French nursery rhyme, are gathering together, just as they may be seen doing any fine afternoon in the Tuileries gardens, have any covert reference to the gathering of nations in the Hyde Park building, it is not easy to say, nor important to decide. The vase may take its stand on its own merits as a simply graceful production, and none can say it nay.

